



**Work Papers of the Summer
Institute of Linguistics,
University of North Dakota
Session**

Volume 18

Article 4

1974

Comments on the decimal classification of New Guinea languages

Alan Healey
SIL-UND

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/sil-work-papers>

Recommended Citation

Healey, Alan (1974) "Comments on the decimal classification of New Guinea languages," *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*: Vol. 18 , Article 4.

DOI: 10.31356/silwp.vol18.04

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/sil-work-papers/vol18/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session by an authorized editor of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact zeineb.yousif@library.und.edu.

COMMENTS ON THE DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION
OF NEW GUINEA LANGUAGES

Alan Healey

After talking to our acting librarian, I would like to make the following comments on your tentative decimal classification (1973 Workpapers of SIL UND: 135 - 154):

1. The system our library uses is as follows:

499.11---NAN languages of Irian Jaya (West Irian)

499.12---NAN languages of Papua New Guinea

Following this we use two more decimals to indicate the political-geographical district within Papua New Guinea. Following this we use two letters for the first two letters of the language name. After this there are one or two digits (taken from Dewey somewhere) to indicate the sub-topic within linguistics. e.g.

499.1218 Te 53

NAN P.N.G. West Telefol grammar clauses
 Sepik
 Listrikt

2. This has one disadvantage that every few years some district boundaries are changed or new districts are created and certain items in our library have to be recatalogued. However, I feel that the same problem is found in your system. The linguistic classification of some languages in the long-studies areas and of all languages in the little-studies areas are not generally agreed on and are very likely to be changed several times each in the next twenty years. In fact, Wurm put out a workpaper last year with a re-classification of the NAN languages!

3. Our librarian reacts negatively to the long decimals in the latest edition of Dewey and in your numbers. That is, whereas she is happy with the three digit ones on pages 137-8 she is bothered visually by the five digit ones on pages 140-153. I guess she would prefer to see you add two letters to your three digits to identify specific languages, in the way our library does.

4. Whereas I feel fairly comfortable about your phylum and stock numbers on pages 137-8 (apart from the temporary nature of the classification they are based on), I also feel unhappy about having to have five digit decimals for the specific languages. But first back to page 137. I feel you should not waste 3-digit decimals on language isolates like .123 Dem, .145 Wiru, .154 Guh-Samane, etc. I would prefer to see all isolates given four-digit decimals. Of course, this means lumping them in with some other stock or family, and to that extent ignoring the hierarchy or logic of the original linguistic classification.

5. By applying a similar principle of ignoring families and sub-families somewhat where it is convenient I am sure that many of your five-digit decimals can be reduced to four digits. For instance on page 144 I would re-classify and re-organize the 499.144 section as follows:

.1441 Enga, Wape	.1445 Lemben
.1442 Kyaka	.1446 Huli
.1443 Ipili	.1447 Mendi, Waola (not listed)
.1444 Nete (not listed)	.1448 Magi
	.1449 Kewa, Augu, Sau, Pole

What I did was to put very closely related languages (Mendi, Waola) and all dialects (Kewa, Augu, Sau, Pole) together.

6. In the opposite direction, I would also be happy to allot two adjacent 3-digit decimals to two (linguistic or geographic) parts of one family if it contained more than ten languages. e.g. .153 north and central Binandere family, .154 southern Binandere family plus Guhu-Samane.